

Eminem, Elton's 'Stan' Duet Proves Anticlimactic

Protests against joint appearance by rapper with gay-bashing lyrics, bisexual pop star had Recording Academy on defensive.

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Considering all the pre-show turmoil stirred up by Eminem's planned duet with Elton John, the actual performance of "Stan" by El and Em couldn't match the Grammy-sized hype brought on by detractors and supporters.

Before Eminem and Elton could even take the stage of the Staples Center on Wednesday (February 21), Recording Academy President and CEO Michael Greene was already on the defensive. During a lengthy introduction, Greene explained the joint appearance by stressing the need for tolerance among all people, even though his comments threatened to run longer than the actual song itself.

While they freestyled through "Bennie and the Jets" during rehearsals Tuesday, Eminem and John were all business during the Grammy telecast, with the rapper taking the stage decked out in a light-blue jumpsuit.

Delivering the first verse of "Stan" from a bed on the right side of the stage, Eminem let the song's increasingly paranoid and frantic narrative build slowly, as John, wearing a pink-dotted suit, played keyboards on the left side of the stage.

Although relatively tame by his own standards, Eminem's lyrical flow apparently was more than enough to confuse the network censors, who failed to bleep out most of the profanities uttered by Eminem, instead editing out words delivered just before or just after the offending lyrics.

As John lent his unique vocal spin and a driving piano part to the chorus, a part that was sampled from Dido's "Thankyou" in the original version of "Stan," Eminem's vocals became increasingly more agitated as he assumed the guise of the title character — an obsessed fan who eventually kills himself and his pregnant girlfriend by driving them off a bridge.

For the final, first-person verse, Eminem slipped behind a desk at the center of the stage — so as to clearly differentiate the character of Stan from that of himself — while John punctuated the drama with some bluesy, rolling piano licks.

After finishing the number, Eminem and John embraced and held one another's hand aloft in a symbol of unity, although the rapper quickly reasserted his street cred by flipping off the Grammy audience.

While the GLAAD-organized protest of Eminem held outside the Staples Center drew only a few dozen protesters, those who were there might have taken solace in the fact that despite the high-profile set, the rapper was denied the most prestigious award of the evening.

For the past two years, the last performer of the evening also took home the Grammy Award for Album of the Year, a feat accomplished by Lauryn Hill and her *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* in 1999 and Santana's *Supernatural* in 2000.

Following his and John's performance of "Stan," Eminem watched from the side stage as '70s rock vets Steely Dan won the Album of the Year Grammy for *Two Against Nature*, the group's first new studio album in 20 years.